

[An Italian Shed Owner]

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Miss Mary Tomasi

63 Barre St.

Montpelier, VT. The Granite Worker Italian

AN ITALIAN SHED OWNER

Perhaps a dozen sheds are strung along the banks of the Winocski in the Pioneer section. For the most part they are neat and well kept, prosperous looking sheds, but the inevitable grey of stone and dust, and its unavoidable associate dreariness pervade the scene. Opposite the last shed and on a knoll across the width of cement road in a red brick house. A carved urn rests upon the step landing.

"I had it built when I bought that shed over there," Mr, Tornazzi said with a wave of his hand towards the sprawling river-flat building.

He was a small man, over sixty, fair skinned, with silky hair of salt-and-pepper grey. His features were delicately molded and sensitive.

He said: I was born in Baveno, Italy. That's in northern Italy near lake Maggiore. I studied sculpturing eight years, and graduated from the [Reale Accademia?] of [Bella Arte di Brera?] in [Milan?]. I worked in the northern provinces for two years and spent one year in Saragossa (?) Spain. There's always a demand for good carvers in both Italy and Spain. There was then. Not only for memorials but for buildings. The architecture in these countries is much more ornate than here in the States. But the pay is less. When I was

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over there last year, the average worker was getting around [\$?]3.00 C.3 [??] 2 a day, here he gets over \$6.00. And living expenses aren't any cheaper. If you want to live there as you are accustomed to over here, you have to spend just as much, and more. I'd heard about the granite industry in the Barre district, that it was still young and booming. I decided to try my luck over here. I came over on a French boat from Havre, France. French boats were popular in those days. A few years later Italy woke up to the fact that she should have more and better boats. Today most of the Italians come over on Italian boats.

No, I didn't start operating a shed of my own right away, although I could have. I wanted to learn more of this country, the way the sheds did business, etc. I did carving for a shed in Barre the first year. The second year I went out to our western granite States. I could compare the two localities then, and the granite. I found you could do better, more delicate work with the hard Barre stone, and I learned that it rated high in eastern markets and was quickly becoming known further west, so I decided to settle in or near Barre.

My brother, who had come to this country two years before I did, suggested that we start a shed of our own. We did. It went under the name of Tornazzi Bros. We've had our ups and downs as every business has, but we've made money and we've put out plenty of memorials that we're proud of. Twelve years ago my brother died. Yes, it was stonecutter's T. B. He'd never married, so now the whole shed was mine. 3 Yes, I married. My daughter tells me it's like a story in a book. From Havre I came to New York; and from there, direct to Barre. Passing through the town in the train, my first impression was not unlike that of several small industrial communities in Italy, France and Spain. Small stores, back yard washings, a town that was very much lived in. Not of the size nor grandeur of Milan where I had been studying, but a live, thriving town in the center of hills, like my home town. I'd hardly stepped off the train when I heard my brother calling, "Ettore! Ettore!" There he was waiting for me on the platform, and beside him was a pretty girl, red-checked and very slim. I must have stared at her like a country fool. She mumbled a good-bye to my brother and hurried away. Carlo, my brother, was eager to hear the news from the old country.

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How were the parents, and the sister? Did I have a good trip? I'm afraid I answered him briefly. I was interested in the girl. Who was she? Was she already married. Did Carlo know her well? Her name was Rosa, Carlo told me. She was born in Barre and educated there. Her parents were Italian. She worked in a millinery shop on Main Street. That was information enough for me. For a week I made it my business to pass that milliner's store every day. I saw her, and she saw me. She wouldn't even smile. I didn't have the courage to speak to her. I finally persuaded my brother to introduce us. We were married the following year. It wasn't a Roman Catholic service, just a civil ceremony. Rosa's people had already 4 broken from the church before they left the old country. We have one daughter. She went to the public schools here and to The Castle, a finishing school on the Hudson. She was married two years ago to an Irish boy from Barre. He's here with us now learning the granite business, in the shed itself and in the office. I want him well trained. Some day the business will be his and my daughter's.

There isn't the profit in the business that there used to be. In the old days a roof over the head, a good carver, and good granite were about all that were necessary. Today there's too much overhead. Three or four taxes a year, machinery, and that expensive dust removing equipment. Today, too, much of our granite is sent out unfinished. That is, the customer has it finished in his own locality. That's why our really good carvers are thinning out. There isn't the demand for them that there used to be. I have a quarry over at Groton. it hasn't been operating for a dozen years or so. It's good granite, but I was interested in supplying only my own shed. Working it on so small a scale I found it more profitable to buy from the large Barre quarries.

"I've done little sculpturing these last years," Mr. Tornazzi said. "This is one of ny favorite pieces."

It was a delicately sculptured Grace, about fourteen inches high, tiptoeing on a pedestal at the foot of the curved stairway.

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Mr. Tornazzi continued: my favorite memorial and what I believe is my masterpiece is one of my very early statues. 5 It's called The Little Margaret. It stands in the Green Mountain Cemetery in Montpelier. There's a story to that, too. I won't tell customer's name, although you can easily find out by going to the cemetery and looking at the memorial. This customer wanted me to carve a statue of his little daughter who was dead. I'd never seen the girl. Her family produced a full length picture of her and asked me to make the statue identical in clothing, posture, etc. I said it would be difficult since the picture was a poor one, and faint, but I'd do my best. I completed it, and was justly proud of it. The parents liked it, too. I remember the mother cried and said it looked real. But in spite of their satisfaction they hated to pay the price agreed upon. I admit it was a steep price, but it was good work, and hard, and they could afford it. Well, the father came to me one day. He pointed to the picture and said, 'Look, you promised to make the statue exactly like this picture. You didn't. On the memorial there's a button missing on one shoe. Since they aren't identical you should lower the price.' It made me mad. I'd been very careful in carving those shoes, they were those old-fashioned, high buttoned shoes the girls wore at that time, and since the picture was so dim I'd been careful to make sure of each detail. 'They are identical,' I assured him and proceeded to prove it. A magnifying glass held over the picture showed that sure enough one button was missing on the shoe. Well, the short of it is the man stopped quibbling and paid the 6 price I'd asked. Another one of my best pieces is the statue of Christ the Shepherd, in Chicago.

Of late I haven't done much carving, I have enough to do taking care at the business end of the shed. Strikes are bad for both the shed owner and the workers. I've lost customers because of contracts for memorials that fall due during a strike period. If the stone isn't delivered on the day called for in the contract, they can refuse to accept it. There have been times when I've been tempted to work the shed scab, but I finally decide that it isn't worthwhile. I've had workers come to me secretly during a strike and offer to work. Their reason is a good one, they need the money to support their families.